

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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IS AMERICA DRIFTING TO THE RIGHT?

ANNCR:

A RECENT POLL CONDUCTED BY THE NEW YORK TIMES AND THE COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM SHOWS THAT AMERICANS WHO IDENTIFY AS CONSERVATIVES OUTNUMBER THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES LIBERALS BY NEARLY TWO-TO-ONE. THIS AND OTHER SURVEYS TAKEN IN THE PAST YEAR SEEM TO INDICATE A NATION-WIDE DRIFT TO THE RIGHT. BUT AS NEWS ANALYST CHARLES MEDD POINTS OUT THE TREND IS NOT EXACTLY CLEAR.

VOICE:

IF WE ARE TO JUDGE POLITICAL TRENDS BY WHAT IS BEING SAID IN PUBLIC FORUMS AND AT WHAT VOLUME, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE ALREADY TAKEN OVER. ON ISSUE AFTER ISSUE -- FROM OPPOSITION TO THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES TO GOVERNMENT FINANCING OF ABORTIONS -- IT'S THE CONSERVATIVE VOICE THAT RINGS THE LOUDEST. THE APPEARENT SHIFT TO THE RIGHT IS SUPPORTED NOT ONLY BY WHAT THE POLLS ARE SAYING BUT, MORE PERSUASIVELY, BY HOW THE POLITICIANS ARE BEHAVING. AT THE STATE LEVEL, LEGISLATURES ARE SAYING "NO" TO A MILDLY WORDED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT OUTLINING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, CONGRESS HAS VOTED FOR MORE DEFENSE MONEY THAN EVEN THE PENTAGON WANTS, AND PRESIDENT CARTER'S NEW BUDGET PLANS WON MORE APPLAUSE FROM CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICANS THAN FROM LIBERALS OF HIS OWN PARTY.

WHILE THERE ARE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THIS SEEMING TREND, THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT ABOUT ONE BASIC FACT -- THE RECENT DISILLUSIONMENT OF MANY AMERICAN ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND ITS CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH MODERN ISSUES. EVEN LIBERALS -- FOR WHOM A BIG AND ACTIVE GOVERNMENT WAS LONG AN ARTICLE OF FAITH -- ADMIT TODAY THAT

THEY ARE TIRED OF TAXES, RED TAPE AND WHAT MANY SEE AS DISAPPOINTMENTS, IF NOT BLUNDERS, IN WASHINGTON.

THIS SHIFT IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES HAS BEEN EXPLOITED BY CONSERVATIVES, ESPECIALLY THOSE ON THE EXTREME RIGHT. CONSERVATIVE MESSAGES ARE NOW REACHING MASS AUDIENCES THROUGH COMPUTERIZED MAILING LISTS AND OTHER ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES WHICH THEIR LIBERAL OPPONENTS HAVE USED FOR YEARS.

BUT THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THESE WELL-ORGANIZED AND WELL-FINANCED PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS MAY DISTORT THE REAL STRENGTH OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT. MANY OBSERVERS ARE CONVINCED THAT THE POLITICAL PENDULUM IS NOT SWINGING SHARPLY FROM LEFT TO RIGHT BUT RATHER BACK TO THE MIDDLE WHERE IT WAS BEFORE THE LEFTWARD DRIFT AND COSTLY SOCIAL PROGRAMS OF THE 1960'S. IF THAT PERIOD CREATED PUBLIC DOUBT ABOUT THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENT, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC NOW FEELS THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD RETREAT FROM ITS LEGITIMATE RESPONSIBILITIES. FOR THE POLLS THAT SHOW MORE AMERICANS CALLING THEMSELVES CONSERVATIVE SHOW THE SAME PEOPLE, BY WIDE MARGINS, IN FULL SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE FOR THE POOR, JOBS FOR THE UNEMPLOYED, SAFETY STANDARDS FOR INDUSTRY. SUCH PROGRAMS WERE AN ANATHEMA TO CONSERVATIVES OF AN EARLIER ERA, AND THEY STILL ARE TO SPOKESMEN FOR THE EXTREME RIGHT OF TODAY. AND BECAUSE THESE SPOKESMEN ARE DOING SO MUCH TALKING, IT'S NOT AT ALL CLEAR HOW FAR TO THE RIGHT THE NATION IS REALLY MOVING.

JS/RCS